28: Spiro--20 (1947-48) 1949 Woleaians
116, 623, 123 Ifalik

"The chiefs assemble the people for public meetings whenever they wish to announce a new policy or some new event. Before the people are assembled, however, the chiefs meet alone to decide among themselves what actions or decisions are to be taken. And though the chiefs are ranked in a descending heirarchy, the decision is always arrived at by a concensus rather than by any one prevailing over the others. From the nature of their discussions, which we were always permitted to attend, it seems that a majority decision is not sufficient, so that they continue to discuss the matter until they can all agree on the course to be taken. At times this requires a long time. For example, Dr. Burrows and I asked Tom if we might rent a canoe for the duration of our stay. He said that he would speak to the chiefs, since a matter of that kind would require their consideration. The chiefs had a special meeting, requiring three hours to decide what objectively looked like a very simple matter. The decision, incidentally, was to give us a canoe for the duration of our stay, but with the stipulation that we confine our canoeing to the lagoon, lest we go into the ocean, and capsize, in which case the chiefs would feel 'very bad.' It is also of interest parenthetically, in terms of the Ifaluk emphasis on status, that after informing us of the chiefs' decision, Tom told us that when we return to America we should inform the people and the chief that the Ifalukians were very good to us, and had given us a canoe, and 'then, Ifaluk more high.'"

28: Spiro--20 [2] (1947-48) 1949 Woleaians
116, 623, 421 Ifalik

"After making their decisions and deciding on an agenda the chiefs let it be known that a public meeting will be held the next day, or in two days. On the morning of the designated day, the chiefs assemble in the canoe-house next to the Fanap, the public meeting house. (1)"

"1. The entire plot of land, holding the canoe-house and the fanap, is called Atelu, and quasi-sacred property, which belongs to the chiefs, and which people seldom frequent: The chiefs had us pitch our tent on this land."

"Taroman, the fifth ranking chief then announces the meeting by blowing on a conk shell, which hangs in the fanap, and is used only for that purpose. Time is relatively unimportant on Ifaluk, and the people show no great alacrity in assembling. A delay of one to two hours between the sounding of the conk and the assembling of the people is by no means unusual. When the people begin to assemble the chiefs enter the fanap, where they sit near the front pillar. (1) There are no [21] special seating places at these meetings, any one sitting where he chooses, some in the fanap, some along the sides or

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"1. To stand in the presence of another is an insult, this being one of the first things an Ifaluk child is taught. Not even the chiefs will stand in the presence of the people, even when addressing them. The American Military Government officers respected this folkway, as did the anthropologists, which contrasted very favorably, in the eyes of the natives, with the Japanese practice of talking to the natives while standing on a table."

in front of it. The one invariable practice in seating arrangement, however, is the complete separation of the sexes, under no circumstances do men and women sit together.

Since there is little formality in Ifaluk, the meetings are conducted in a fairly haphazard manner, any one of the five chiefs making the opening speech. The chiefs, as we shall note later, are always informal and their behavior at the meetings is no exception some reclining or actually lying flat while the meeting is in progress.

Before noting the general features of these meetings, it might be well to describe some of the individual meetings in terms of subjects discussed as this will give not only the form of the meetings, but also the values with which the culture is concerned.

There were four meetings held during our seven month stay. The first was called on the occasion of our arrival, and we did not attend as we were in the midst of setting up camp. This was on July 29, and its purpose was to discuss our arrival, the manner in which people were to respond to us, and to appoint a boy to assist us in our camp, the latter being done on their own initiative, without a request from us.

The second meeting, on August 14, was occasioned by my mentioning to the men that other anthropologists were making studies of other islands. The chiefs informed the people that they were to follow implicitly the recommendations made by the Military

Government officers and the Navy doctors, about clearing the rubbish around their houses, and building over-water heads (1). Furthermore, they must cooperate with us, and do whatever we might request. There was little discussion by the people, but their response to the recommendations was immediate, for at the close of the meeting the men began to erect over-water heads, and the women were already cleaning their courtyards as I walked through the village. The admonition to cooperate with us had already been

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"1. This is an example of navy unwarranted generalization. On Yap the natives defecate on the ground, with the result that Yap is plagued with diseases of all kinds. The Navy has encouraged the natives to build over-water heads to preclude the polluting of the ground, and thus preventing disease. When they arrived on Ifaluk, they assumed that the Ifaluk pattern was similar to Yap's, and suggested to the chiefs that over-water heads be erected. This suggestion, however, was entirely unnecessary since the Ifaluk natives almost invariably use the lagoon for their ablutions, abhoring the sight and smell of faeces."

practiced before the meeting had been called.

The next meeting was called on September 4, and it seems that I was indirectly responsible for its occasion. On September 2 our first (and last) station ship arrived, and after it left I informed the chiefs that the officers had commented on the cleanliness of the island (1), and had said that except for a few spots, Ifaluk was the neatest island they had seen. The chiefs were very pleased by this compliment, [22] and decided to call a meeting to instruct the people to better their efforts in cleanliness.

At this meeting, which lasted about one hour, Wolptau and Taroman, the first and fifth ranking chiefs, respectively, bore the lion's share of the talking, with Paluelimar, third in rank, making a minor contribution, and Maroligar and Wolpatitik not uttering a word. Both chiefs and people were very serious, the former speaking long, loudly and

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"1. This was later born out by my own observations, for on our way home we visited most islands in the Yap district, and most of them revealed rubbish and litter strewn about, whereas Ifaluk was always tidy and neat."

impassionately. The people listened in silence, and the impression was that of a father admonishing his children. The chiefs began by telling the people that I had informed the officers that the village was always clean and neat, and that they would have to confirm this report in deed, by beginning a general cleanup. They then reported to the favorite theme of all meetings--the admonition not to engage in 'bad talk', and conversely, to speak only 'good talk.' This simple message was repeated by all three speakers numerous times, and in many variations.

Quite significant was the attention devoted to the women, for despite the fact that women shoulder most of the work, it was they who were told that they were not to be indolent, but must work, must prepare food and make lavalavs. The men, too, were warned to exercise greater diligence, but not to the same degree as the women.

The people remained silent throughout, neither questioning their chiefs nor addressing remarks to them. At the conclusion, Wolptau distributed tobacco and American cigarettes to all the people assembled. The distribution of tobacco is an invariable, unqualifiedly universal feature of Ifaluk social life, it being distributed after every political meeting, religious ceremony, communal work. It is to be noted, also, that the cigarettes that Commander Kenney, the Commanding officer on Yap, had given to the chiefs as personal gifts, were not kept by them, but were given to their people. This

distribution followed the pattern of all such distributions--the chief would call the name of each district, and any adult male would respond for his district, obtain the tobacco from the chiefs, and then pass it among his fellows--male and female alike. But the cigarettes, Wolptau distributed personally, and as he approached the women, who of course were seated apart from the men, he spoke to them, warning them not to defecate on the ground, but to retire to the lagoon, and if this were too difficult, they were to use a basket for this purpose and then dispose of the facaes in the lagoon. This speech, delivered with a broad grin on his face, evoked wide laughter, and when he repeated it the second time, the entire people burst into a spontaneous cheer. This little incident is very significant for an understanding of Ifaluk chieftanship, and gives real insight into the intimate relationship that obtains between chief and people. Some of the psychological implications of this relationship will be dealt with in another connection, but here I wish to point out the psychological meaninglessness of a bold ethnographic statement to the effect that a society is governed by a chief or chiefs, for this rubric covers a multiplicity of political realities from the formal, West African potentate to the informal, fatherlike person, just described.

It may be remarked here that the response of the people to the clean-up order was immediate. The following day, the entire population had retired to the bush to carry out their instructions.

The fourth and last public meeting we witnessed was held on October 23. The chiefs had been asking us when we expected the next ship, and we had told them that one should arrive any day, so they called this meeting to inform the people that a ship was due, and that they should prepare for its arrival by another clean-up. Again, as at the previous meeting, Maroligar and Wolpaitik, did no talking at all, Taroman doing most of the speaking, but joined by Wolptau and Paluelimar. Taroman began by warning the people to do no wrong, special emphasis being placed on stealing and lying. He warned the women in particular not to abscond with taro from another woman's taro patch. To be noted in this connection is the paradox of warning people [23] against a transgression of which they are never guilty, for, as we shall see, robbery or thievery never occurs in this culture.

When Taroman was finished, Wolptau took over. He told the men that should any of them go fishing they were to bring their catch to the chiefs for distribution so that the old and the sick would be provided for. This is the customary procedure, but Wolptau saw fit to remind the men of it, since some of the men had been violating this custom. This demonstrates how violations of custom are handled. No individual is rebuked, or singled out, but a general rule of conduct is enunciated, which apparently is sufficient to ensure conformity.

He then turned to the women, warning them against working in the taro patches while menstruating. Again we see the same method of dealing with violations of taboos. The taboo of not entering the taro patch, on supernatural punishment of crop extinction, is known to every one. His necessity of mentioning it at the meeting means that Wolptau had become aware of the violation of the taboo, and dealt with it by this general, admonition, rather than by reprimanding the individual culprit or culprits.

He then turned to the real reason for calling the meeting--he announced the pending arrival of the ship, and ordered the people to begin another general clean-up.

Paluelimar spoke at the conclusion of Wolptau's address. He announced that a dance was to be held in the near future, and that the young men should begin to prepare for it. (this was at our request, for we hadinformed the chiefs of our desire to witness a dance.). He repeated Wolptau's order about the clean-up, and then said that Dr. Burrows and I were to be treated as chiefs, that the people were to do whatever we asked of them, as we were concerned with their welfare.

At the completion of his speech, the chiefs again distributed tobacco, and the meeting broke up informally.

It is discernable from these sketches that the pattern of the meetings is the same in all. But aside from the similarities in the content of the meetings, there are also similarities in the formal aspects, that should be noted."

28: Spiro--23
116, 623, 461

(1947-48) 1949

Woleaians
Ifalik

"Both men and women come to the meetings supplied with work-materials, which keeps them busy during the entire meeting. The men bring their coconut sennet, to be twisted into rope; and the women bring flowers, out of which they make leis, or banana bark fibres, which they make into thread. Throughout the meeting, men and women are busily engaged in their work. The chiefs, too, bring their sennet, and continue to make their rope, even when addressing the people. Though this occured at all the meetings, it was not until the last one that this procedure presented itself to me as a problem. If the people were very diligent and frugal with their time, one could understand this practice without difficulty. But the fact is, as we shall see, the people can, and do, sit around for an entire day, without engaging in a single productive activity. Why, then, this burst of industry at the meetings? When I queried him on this point, Tom answered that a man would be ashamed if he were to be seen just sitting at the meeting without doing anything, for it was not right to be seen doing nothing. In other words, the fact thay they loaf at other times is not important, but at a public meeting no one wishes to be accused of indolence. And yet, plausible, as this interpretation might be on the surface, it is far from satisfying. Why is a man ashamed to be seen without work at a meeting, but not at any other time? Surely, just the opposite should be true. The meetings are very important, and as such, should they not hold the people's undivided attention? At this point we can only indicate the problem, but we shall take it up again when we consider the psychological correlates of Ifaluk culture."

28: Spiro--24
116, 623, 561

(1947-48) 1949

Woleaians
Ifalik

"Another fairly constant factor at the meetings is the contrast between the attitudes of the older and younger people. Whereas the former take the meetings very seriously, with one exception--that of the priest--doctor--the younger men seemed little interested in the proceedings. For example, at one of the meetings, the young men were very slow in arriving, and did not sit in or around the fanap, but sat in the canoe house quite a distance from the fanap. Taroman rebuked them for this, and ordered them into the fanap, and they were quite slow in obeying his directions."

28: Spiro--24 [2] (1947-48) 1949 Woleaians
116, 623 Ifalik

"Like everything else in Ifaluk, the meetings have little, if any, plan. The chiefs may decide to call a meeting a week in advance of its actual occurence, but they make no attempt to plan a definite agenda, or decide who is to speak. It seems that they speak whatever comes to mind, are prodded by the other chiefs, while speaking, frequently turn to the other chiefs for suggestions, and often debate among themselves as to whom is to do the talking, each one passing the buck to the others."

28: Spiro--24 [3] (1947-48) 1949 Woleaians
116, 623, 537, 184 Ifalik

"The speeches of the chiefs shows a definite pattern of delivery. They talk for a certain time, and then lapse into complete silence for an extended period, the only sound being the swishing of the coconut fibre that the men are making into rope. This interval of silence, theoretically, gives the people an opportunity to express themselves, or to take issue with the chiefs if they desire. I say, theoretically, because at none of the meetings we attended did any one make use of this opportunity."